

VZCZCXRO9463
OO RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSL #0455/01 2801534
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 061534Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1995
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000455

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/CE AND NSC (STERLING)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/17/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: THE AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT GASPAROVIC

Classified By: Ambassador Vincent Obsitnik for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Ambassador met September 30 with President Gasparovic, in preparation for the Slovak leader's October 9 visit to the White House. While Slovak entry into the Visa Waiver Program would obviously be one positive topic of the meeting, to ensure a successful visit the Ambassador urged Gasparovic to be as forward-leaning as possible on Afghanistan, Georgia, Kosovo, and tolerance of ethnic minorities in Slovakia. Gasparovic reiterated his sincere thanks for the opportunity to meet with President Bush in Washington and for the continued progress on visa-free travel. He cited both NATO commitments and Slovak national interests in affirming Slovakia's desire to participate fully in military operations in Afghanistan, although this visit is unlikely to be bring an announcement on the removal of caveats. Gasparovic was fully supportive of U.S. policies toward Iran and on missile defense, and hopeful that Iraq's future is now secure. On Georgia, he restated Slovak support for the country's territorial integrity, as well as his commitment to the Bucharest NATO Summit's position that both Georgia and Ukraine will ultimately be invited to join the MAP program. Gasparovic remains opposed to recognition of Kosovo, citing the precedent it sets not only in the case of Georgia's breakaway republics but also elsewhere in Europe. Gasparovic was particularly vehement in linking Kosovo to the aspirations of Hungarian ethnic minorities in Slovakia and, by extension, Romania for greater autonomy. At the Ambassador's suggestion that he rise above the fray and make a clear public statement in support of ethnic tolerance, Gasparovic said he would consider it. Ed Summary.

2. (C) In anticipation of President Gasparovic's October 9 Oval Office meeting with President Bush, the Ambassador called on the Slovak president September 30. While acknowledging the likely Slovak entry into the Visa Waiver Program would be the major public highlight of the visit, the Ambassador also urged Gasparovic to consider additional positive messages Gasparovic might bring to Washington. In particular, he urged Gasparovic to make as direct a statement as he could on removing caveats from the Slovak recently-increased contribution in Afghanistan. Similarly, he suggested that Gasparovic link Slovak support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity with a restatement of the commitment to bring both Georgia and Ukraine into NATO's MAP program. The Ambassador also engaged Gasparovic on the issue of Slovak recognition of Kosovo, citing the very clear international legal basis for Kosovo's declaration of independence. Finally, he urged the Slovak president to speak out publicly on the importance of ethnic tolerance, particularly given several anti-Semitic statements made earlier in the month in the Slovak parliament and the recent - and very public - tensions that have arisen over the status of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia. The Ambassador has made a similar approach to Foreign Minister Kubis on September 29.

3. (C) Gasparovic warmly welcomed the opportunity to meet

President Bush in Washington, and expressed his sincere thanks for the President's role in bringing Slovakia into NATO, his support for Slovak EU membership, and his personal commitment to bringing Slovakia and other allies into the Visa Waiver Program. He confirmed his desire to have a positive, successful meeting with the U.S. president, and continued that Slovakia's entry into NATO represented a free, voluntary decision. Slovakia wants to be a contributor to Alliance security, not just a consumer. In the future, as Slovak military capabilities evolve, the country wants to engage in more and more operational roles within the Alliance, assuming its full share of the responsibilities inherent in NATO membership. This, he underscored, represented not only his personal view but the plans of Minister of Defense Baska. At present, Gasparovic acknowledged, Slovakia was not fully able to engage in military operations in Afghanistan, but the country is working with the Dutch (under whose immediate command Slovak troops are deployed there) to expand the Slovak role in the future. In the prior day's meeting, Kubis was more direct in stating that Slovakia was committed to removing the restrictions under which Slovak troops operate, but noted that this could only take place with future unit rotations.

14. (C) Gasparovic said he would also emphasize to President Bush the importance of greater U.S., NATO and EU cooperation to address the situation along the Afghan-Pakistan border; he argued that the EU was not sufficiently engaged on the situation in Pakistan and said he would raise it with French President Sarkozy during Sarkozy's January 2009 visit to Bratislava. On Iraq, Gasparovic said he may ask President Bush about U.S. plans there (note: we will be providing him

BRATISLAVA 00000455 002 OF 002

with some official updates before his departure for the U.S.). On Iran, he said he was exactly in agreement with the U.S. approach to Iran's nuclear program, and cited Iranian nuclear ambitions - and anti-Israeli rhetoric - as explaining his support for missile defense.

15. (C) The Slovak government - the President, Prime Minister Fico, and the Foreign Minister - is united in its support for international law and thus for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Gasparovic emphasized. While he noted that the Georgian president had made some bad decisions in the lead-up to the August crisis ("a responsible president has to be more careful"), Gasparovic nevertheless reiterated support for the Bucharest NATO Summit's commitments on eventual Georgian and Ukrainian entry into NATO's membership action plan (MAP) program. Slovakia, for example, values its role as the lead NATO embassy in Ukraine and plans to keep moving forward on preparing the Ukrainians for MAP. That said, he recommended that NATO foreign ministers not wait until the December NAC to engage on the issue; to avoid a "stormy" December NAC, he urged ministers to hold one or two preliminary meetings before their December gathering. Kubis, in our September 29 meeting, had been less optimistic regarding early

Georgian entry into MAP, noting that a number of NATO allies were now hesitating.

16. (C) Gasparovic continues to question both the process by which Kosovo declared independence and the political decision itself. He said he remained opposed to recognition of Kosovo, although he acknowledged that Serbia needed to find "an acceptable solution" as a means of securing eventual EU membership. High-level negotiations involving the Serbs, the U.S., and the EU would be essential, he said, and all options (including the possible division of Kosovo) should remain on the table. Russia will have an important role to play in such negotiations, he added.

17. (C) In response to the Ambassador's suggestion that he speak out on the importance of tolerance before leaving for Washington, Gasparovic said he would consider the suggestion. He put most of the blame for recent tensions on Hungary and

ethnic Hungarians (in Slovakia, Hungary, and also Romania), citing in particular the so-called Forum for Parliamentary Members from the Carpathian Basin, a multi-national assembly made of ethnic Hungarians from Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and possibly other states with ethnic Hungarian minorities. Gasparovic described proponents of greater ethnic Hungarian autonomy as "very aggressive" and their plans as "dangerous," linking them to developments in Kosovo. He argued that ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia were treated well, with ample educational and cultural options and cited recent polls suggesting a majority of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia are satisfied with their status and treatment. On the anti-Semitic statements made recently in parliament, he noted that he had spoken strongly against anti-Semitism in a recent Holocaust memorial event, and added that he would be meeting with three influential American Jewish organizations during this trip to Washington.

18. (C) Embassy Comment: Gasparovic is clearly delighted with this opportunity to visit Washington and meet with President Bush, not least because it will directly link him to the Visa Waiver Program just as the next Slovak presidential elections are beginning to generate some (albeit limited) domestic interest. Gasparovic welcomes the chance to put himself in the limelight and, while not able to deliver a removal of Afghanistan caveats, is anxious to highlight his self-declared role as an Atlanticist, committed supporter NATO, and close friend of the U.S. within the Slovak political hierarchy. Even on Kosovo - where Gasparovic differs significantly and quite emotionally with us - he will work hard to avoid any public dust-up. With the economy continuing to do well (despite global financial turbulence), visa waiver on the horizon, and entry into the Euro zone on track, the only potential negative on Slovak radar screens is the very public tension that has recently reemerged in Slovak-Hungarian relations.

Both Gasparovic and Kubis reacted viscerally when the Ambassador raised the issue, even as the Ambassador urged them to take the high road in support of tolerance. End Comment.
OBSITNIK